

Schaefer on Wine

By Dennis Schaefer

You, too, can be a Santa Barbara County winemaker

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Ever had the notion you could be a winemaker? Many folks, fascinated by the process and the resultant product, would like to dip their toe in the wine barrel, so to speak. But the cost can be quite prohibitive. However, a few years back, an outfit called Crushpad opened a small custom grape crush and winemaking facility in San Francisco, focusing on helping regular people who have day jobs indulge in their fantasy of winemaking.

Michael A. Giarraputo, a marketing executive in Basking Ridge, N.J., got the home winemaking bug, winning medals in amateur competitions, and wanted to move up the professional level. The Italian name Giarraputo translates into English as "jar of knowledge," thus his label is Think Tank.



Syrah, White Hawk Vineyard 2007 (\$45):

Dark, extracted and deep purple in color, this syrah gives off aromatics of damson plum, prunes, bacon fat and freshly turned soil. On the palate, plum, dark berry, lavender, bacon fat, burnt creme brulee crust, graphite and printer's ink flavors are woven together to knit an entire fabric of flavors.

This is a true dark star of syrah, perhaps the best young White Hawk Vineyard syrah I have ever tasted. The fruit and spice flavors meld together seamlessly on mid-palate and the finish is generous and long-lived.

Pinot Noir, La Encantada Vineyard 2007 (\$60): The immediate aromatics tend toward beet root, cola, root beer and tree bark, but with a little swirling in the glass the fruit comes to the fore. Surprisingly (at least given the nose), on the palate, it is bright, fresh, racy and almost giddy with bright cherry and strawberry flavors, which is an anomaly for this particular vineyard. But quite sneakily, an undercurrent of deeper, darker plum and black cherry flavors make themselves known. Tasted a day after opening, the flavors do stretch out with both bright and dark flavors prominent. With such great fruit concentration, decanting is recommended.